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ABSTRACT

Now almost totally dependent on textile production, heavily forested Union County, South Carolina, was primarily agricultural until the 20th century. By 1970, 65% of the population depended on manufacturing and only 4% of the workers on farming. From 1920 to 1970 the population was characterized by a rural-to-urban shift and by outmigration, especially of blacks, resulting in a limited work force. Faced with textile mill closings and the highest unemployment in the country in the first quarter of 1975, county leaders began a program to diversify Union County's economic base. Five leaders interviewed in 1978 mentioned the numerous benefits of the "Great Towns" program, begun in 1976. Other development projects mentioned, some of which were federally funded, included manufacturing expansion, transportation, educational facilities, health and other service improvements, and especially, a Farmers Market in downtown Union established as a joint effort by city, county, and other officials. In addition to benefitting area consumers and the county's few farmers, the quality of life and expectations for future collaboration improved unexpectedly. Leaders were cautiously optimistic for the future, provided that industry be diversified, established leadership be rejuvenated, and technical/vocational training be established locally. (SB)

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SOUTHERN REGIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT
SOCIAL ORGANIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT
OF LOW-INCOME RURAL COUNTIES

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[A Profile of Union County, South Carolina]

Profile - Objectives A and B
Union County
South Carolina

January, 1979

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Introduction

The following bulletin has been prepared by the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at Clemson University in conjunction with the Regional S-120 Research Project. For several years South Carolina research representatives have been examining rural leadership structures in Union, Kershaw, and Williamsburg Counties. In each county, economic, service, and leadership developments were examined. Specific development accomplishments were also examined in each county. In Union County, the establishment of a Farmers Market was studied as an example of one development accomplishment.

The first section of this report is descriptive in nature. It will review the history, physical characteristics, and demographic changes that have occurred in Union County. The report will also deal with economic and service issues in the county. Part of the information presented in this descriptive section is based on interviews conducted with five community leaders in the fall of 1978. Their opinions and perceptions of development in Union County are presented in the last segment of this bulletin.

I History

The earliest white settlers to come to Union County were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who settled near Fairforest Creek in 1751. By 1755 another settlement had been established at Brown's Creek and, in 1756, the Union church was built. However, it was not until 1785 that Union County had its formal beginnings. In June, 1785, seven men came together at the

home of Alexander McDougal to discuss the formation of a county government. The county was formed out of the old Ninety-Six district. Later that same year, Royal Governor Glenn finalized a treaty with the Cherokee Indians and a permanent settlement was established.

The county's name is taken from the Union Church erected near the site of the present City of Union. The church was interdenominational and was used mainly by Presbyterians, Quakers, and Episcopalians. Union County was the site of several Revolutionary War struggles between the British and the patriots. The Battles of Musgrove Mill, Atterson's Fort, and Fish Dam were fought there. During the Civil War, Union County resident William Gist was the secession Governor of South Carolina. His estate at Rose Hill is now restored and operated by the South Carolina Parks Commission. Because of its involvement in both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the Old Union Cemetary is of interest to historians.

While the county was primarily agricultural in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first industry began in 1889 with the establishment of the Oil Mill. Four years later, in 1893, the first textile mill was opened in Union County. By 1970 Union County had over thirty industries, almost all of them textile related. Other than a large steel plant and a few pulpwood companies, Union has been almost totally dependent upon textile manufacturing. This lack of diversification became a problem for the county's citizens in 1975 when the recession temporarily closed the mills. At one point during this

recession, Union had one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation with an annual rate of 14.3%. During part of 1975, the rate of unemployment rose to over 50% of the textile labor force. The economic and personal impact of this work lay-off pointed community leaders in the direction of seeking a more diverse economic base. Soliciting new and varied industries to the county is now a primary goal to the leaders of Union. The fact that Union County has an anti-labor union sentiment is seen as an attraction to potential industry from the north and east.

II Topography and Physical Geography

Union County is located in the Piedmont Plateau of South Carolina, forty miles south of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is bordered by the Pacolet River in the north, the Broad River on the eastern side, and the Enoree River to the south. It is traversed by the Tyger River. The 515 square miles of Union County are slightly rolling and well drained. It has an annual average temperature of 64 degrees and an annual precipitation of 47 inches. Its climate is moderate with the average first killing frost on November 5, and the last spring frost on March 29. The county is heavily forested, with 291,400 of its 329,000 total acres in forestland. Of this forest land, the government owns 56,500 acres, various forest industries own 39,700, and the remainder is privately owned. The population density is relatively sparse at 56.9 people per square mile.

III Demographic Information

The current population of Union County, based on a 1976 provisional census estimate, is 30,000 people. This figure slightly less than that of 1910. (Table 1)

The actual movement of people into and out of Union County is masked by these simple population change figures. From 1950-1960, for example, Union decreased in population 4%, the 1960-1970 decrease was 2%. However, because the birth rate is more than twice the death rate, the slow decline is due to outmigration. From 1960 to 1970 Union had a net migration decrease of 16%. Much of this population loss is due to the outmigration of blacks from Union County. While the white population of the county has increased 30% between 1920 and 1970, the black population decreased 37% during the same period (Table 2).

In addition to the decrease in black population there has been a shift from rural to more urban populations. During the fifty year period, 1920-1970, the urban portion grew from 20% of the total population in 1920 to 37% in 1970 (Table 3). It can be concluded, then, that there has been a general population trend of increasing urbanization and an outmigration of blacks during the past fifty years in Union County.

Union County has slightly more young people than the state average and fewer people in the young adult to middle age group (18 to 44 years). Union has a higher percentage in the middle age to senior citizens (45 years to over 65 years) category. These statistics substantiate the opinion

of one leader that Union County has a preponderance of old and young residents, and not enough young adults in the work force. This situation is the result of outmigration of the young adults from Union County (Table 4).

Union County's median educational attainment for adults over 25 years of age is somewhat less than the average for the state. The average median education for all races in Union County is 9.1 years, while statewide the average is 10.5 years. Adult white residents of Union County have a median education of 9.7 years while the state figure for white South Carolinians is 11.4 years. Blacks in Union County were very similar in median education to the rest of the state. Union County black residents' median education is 7.5 years as compared with a state median of 7.6 years. This information is based on 1970 census data.

IV Economic Developments and Changes Since 1950.

Since 1940, there has been an 89% decrease in the proportion of the adult population employed in agriculture. While in 1940 nearly a third of the work force was involved in agriculture, by 1968 only 4% of the workers remained in that industry. During the same period, the proportion of the population involved in manufacturing rose 38%. In 1940, 39% of the working population was involved in manufacturing, primarily textile manufacturing. By 1968, well over half of the labor force was so employed. This shift in emphasis from farming to textile mill work has had far-reaching effects in terms of the development of Union County. While 54% of the labor force

is in manufacturing, the second major employer (11% of the work force) is retail trade -- which is economically dependent on the factory worker's ability to purchase commodities (Table 5). Of manufacturing industries, only one major plant was not involved with textiles, the Farrington Steel Company, maker of ball bearings. Compounding the lack of diversification problem is the fact that much of the local textile industry is owned by one firm, the Milliken Company. When foreign textile imports began undercutting domestic piece goods and the general oil price recession of 1975 hit, the manufacture of textile goods in Union was nearly halted. With 65% of the work force directly dependent on manufacturing in the county, Union bacame severely depressed economically. While the unemployment rate of the year, 1975, was 14.3%, there were several winter months in which unemployment was much higher. A network television news story, stated that Union's umemployment was the highest in the nation in the first quarter of 1975.

The impact of a large proportion of unemployed residents alerted community leaders to the need for industrial diversification. With that objective in mind, a number of projects were undertaken. One such project was the Great Towns program begun in 1976. The goal of the program is to improve the economy of rural South Carolina towns by upgrading facilities and services necessary for industrial growth. The project established a number of necessary criteria that had to be met before a town could be awarded "Great Town" status. Community appearance had to be upgraded, at least four bonafide industrial

sites had to be developed at a predetermined price, a community promotion brochure had to be designed and published, and an economic development team had to be selected and trained to deal with industrial prospects. According to one Union leader, a member of the Great Towns project, the program had other developmental benefits. The project reduced fragmentation of efforts and brought together several leadership groups with one central focus. It also promoted a closer working relationship with the state development board and helped to keep land prices down. One project outgrowth was a joint effort undertaken by the Chamber of Commerce and Great Towns committee to recruit industry from the northeast. In May, 1978 the state industrial board set up a trip to Connecticut for twelve Union leaders. In four days, they called on 75 companies that might be interested in relocation. The ramifications of this visit are still not known, though one company will announce its decision in the Spring of 1979 concerning relocation in Union County. Several other industries are also interested in Union, all of them outside of the textile field.

While industrial expansion has been slow in the county, there have been a number of expansions in existing mills. Midway Finishing Plan, Monarch Mills, Somoca Mills, and Excelsior Manufacturing and Merchandizing Division have recently expanded. In addition, Klaypat Industries from Chester has relocated in Union, employing 30 people. The company manufactures recreation and craft items. Expansion is also occurring in the retail area with the opening of a new four lane by-pass around the City of Union. Several grocery, discount, drug, and appar-

el stores have opened there. Land prices in that part of town are also rising and several large homes are currently under construction in the area.

One major development issue frequently mentioned by community leaders was transportation. The City of Union is 25 miles from two major South Carolina interstate highways, I-26 and I-85. For this reason, a four lane highway to Spartanburg, an industrial city 30 miles away, is being planned. Community respondents stated this would make Union a "bedroom community" of Spartanburg and create expansion along this transportation artery. One leader voiced the concern, however, that the highway would facilitate leaving Union more than it would bring people in. Another area of concern was educational facilities. Currently, bidding for the construction of a new high school building is underway.

Union officials have been promoting the development of services in the county as well as industry. One respondent pointed out that community services are important for the attraction of industry as well as necessary for the quality of life. One service area that has needed promotion is health care in the county. Because of a doctor shortage, the Chamber of Commerce has developed a doctor recruitment program. The county has recently acquired three new physicians. Two of them are from India, a husband and wife, and have had to gain community acceptance.

In 1977, Union County was taken out of the Catawba region and placed in the Appalachian region of the Council of Governments. Thus Union now participates in the programs and plann-

ing with two larger, more urban counties, Greenville and Spartanburg. This change, according to respondents, has had mixed results. While it makes services in Spartanburg, the closest metropolitan center, more accessible, county planners are not sure if urban counties will share the funds readily with a smaller population center like Union. One of the problems is federal regulations regarding equipment allocation. Some medical equipment can only be granted to areas with large populations or other pre-existing services. This prohibits smaller counties like Union from becoming more self-reliant in the medical field.

In general, those interviewed felt that the local hospital and medical system was best used for routine and emergency care. Many of the doctors are near retirement age and are limiting their practice; thus, specialized and long term medical needs were usually met in Spartanburg. One area of health care, a home for the aged, is planned for expansion. State funds are currently being sought for this purpose. An outpatient clinic is also projected three to five years hence. Plans are currently being made to expand the Meals on Wheels Program, about a hundred meals per day are now served to the elderly.

Community development funds through the Department of Housing and Urban Development are aiding Union's physical development. One grant for over two million dollars will aid in the renovation of a mill area of the city. Another grant from HUD was approved for $296,500 in August, 1977 for sewer system improvements and recreation facilities. In September of 1977

the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration granted $33,787 for the operation of a Childrens' Home in Union called Another Way. By July of 1977, the City of Union had received $354,000 in EDA funds that are granted to areas of high unemployment. The monies went to physical improvements of parks and schools. Community leaders have recently completed a tax reassessment plan. They express the hope that this will put more money in the county government for direct services.

One area of special development in the community was the formation of a Farmer's Market in downtown Union. It is an open air market where full and part time farmers can bring fresh produce. The project was the result of joint efforts between city council, county council, and the Clemson Extension Service. While the Farmers Market has had only a minor economic impact on the county, it has had social and civic rewards. Several respondents mentioned its importance as an example of various arms of community government working together. They also say it provides a rustic flavor to the town. One respondent also mentioned that it keeps citizens in touch with their agricultural heritage, emphasizing the interdependence of farmers and county residents. A more detailed account of this project follows in the next section of this bulletin.

When asked about the future development of Union County most respondents were cautiously optimistic provided specific problems could be solved. One need is for a technical-vocational training center. The need of diversified industry cannot be met without a trained work force. Currently most of the

county's labor force is unskilled or semi-skilled in the area of textile related jobs. Several respondents cited the need to rejuvenate the older, established leadership structure with younger, more progressive citizens. This was deemed especially important in connection with health and financial institutions. The impact of continued inflation and a possible recession, both national problems, are especially feared in Union. Some respondents were predicting textile slow downs for summer and fall of 1979. Future growth was predicted in the area of retail business. Both large discount and grocery chains specialty shops are expected in Union. Much of this retail expansion will hinge on manufacturing. The sentiment most often voiced was the need for diversification. To most of community leaders, varied industrial development is synonymous with progress. To them, Union is in transition from old, rural methods to a more sophisticated life style. Said one respondent, "this transition may just be my own metamorphasis, but I hope that in another 10 years we'll keep pace with the rest of the nation. I've made a commitment to push progress. I am happy here, but see a lot of areas that need improvement."

V Special Development Issue: Union Farmers Market

The Union Farmer's Market is one example of an economic and community service accomplishment in Union County. Begun in 1977, the market provides an outlet for local farmers to sell their crops and provides a source of fresh produce at a lower cost for area consumers.

The origin of the market dates back to the early 1970's when Clemson extension agent John Lewis Cochran began to discuss the idea with community farmers and leaders. Mr. Cochran was aware of open air markets in other counties that had been successful and thought the idea had merit for Union County. In 1977, Clemson extension agent, Jack Ruff, began to organize and implement the plans for the project. Mr. Ruff began discussing the plans for a market with county and city government, local farmers, and committee members of the Great Towns beautification project. He also publicized the idea in his local news column and radio shows. The result of increased public awareness was a combined effort from many segments of the community.

The city and county governments both provided support for the Farmers Market by contributing funds for the construction of booths and by passing the proposal for the project. In addition, the city sent a clean-up crew to help clear the lot. The beautification process, initiated by the Great Towns committee, gave momentum to the development of the market. The site, owned by Southern Railways, had been littered with overgrown weeds, dead trees, empty cans, bottles and honeysuckle

vines. Southern Railroads had the trees removed and donated the use of the lot "provided no permanent buildings" were constructed on it. Further clean up, shrubbery, and flower gardens were provided by local 4H clubs, a local nursery, and groups of interested citizens. The vocational school built picnic tables and benches. Said one involved leader, "What had once been an eye-sore only one block from the center of town now is a pleasant place that is worth coming to."

The effects of the Farmers Market have not been major in terms of economic impact, since only a small portion of the population is involved in full-time farming. The impact on the over eighty farmers who have used the facility as a means of direct selling feel it is important, however. Prior to the market's establishment, peddling from door to door was inefficient and a "nuisance" according to one respondent. "Local farmers, especially the younger ones, have come to rely on this central outlet. It keeps the money here in Union. Some have even gone from part-time to full-time farming as a result of the market." The market has aided the consumer as well by providing fresh local produce at competitive or lower prices than that offered in retail grocery stores.

The development of the market also had some unanticipated benefits for the community. It provided for the cooperative, joint efforts of three segments of town leadership - City Council, County Council, and the Great Towns Committee. "This set a precedent for future collaboration between leadership bodies" said one respondent. Several leaders also stated that

the market had enhanced the community's quality of life." Most of those interviewed felt that, provided the grounds were properly maintained and the market was limited to the sale of produce, it would continue to be of value to Union residents. One leader summed it up by saying, "I hope it continues to grow. Its pleasant and rustic. It reaffirms that small town feeling and adds to beauty and vitality of the downtown area."

Table 1. Population Data for Union County, South Carolina

Year	Population
1900	25,501
1910	29,911
1920	30,372
1930	30,920
1940	31,360
1950	31,334
1960	30,015
1970	29,230
1976 (provisional estimate)	30,000

Table 2. White/Non-white Population - Union County, South Carolina

Year	Population		Percentiles	
	White	Non-white	White	Non-white
1920	16,287	14,085	53.6	46.4
1930	18,540	12,380	60.0	40.0
1940	20,112	11,248	64.1	35.9
1950	21,278	10,056	67.9	32.1
1960	21,123	8,892	70.4	29.6
1970	20,923	8,277	70.2	29.8

Table 3. Percent Urban and Rural, Union County, South Carolina

Urban (pop. over 2500)		Rural (pop. under 2500)
Year	Percent	Percent
1920	20.2	79.8
1930	24.0	76.0
1940	27.0	73.0
1950	31.1	68.9
1960	34.0	66.0
1970	36.8	63.2

Table 4. Percent of the Union Population by Age Category

Age Group	Union	South Carolina
Under 5 years	8.8%	8.3%
5 years to 17 years	26.2%	24.5%
18 years to 44 years	34.2%	40.3%
45 years to 64 years	21.3%	18.6%
65 years +	9.5%	8.4%

Table 5. Union County: Percentage Composition of Population and Labor Force, Unemployed, and Employed by Industry, 1940, 1950, and 1968, With Percent of Change,

1940 - 1968

	1940	1950	1960 &1968	% Change 1940-1968
Total Population	100.0	100.0	100.0	---
Percentage over 14	68.5	68.6	68.4	- .1
Percentage in Civilian Population	40.4	39.8	39.8	- 1.5
Civilian Labor Force	100.0	100.0	100.0	---
Unemployed	12.1	3.0	4.6	- 62.0
Employed	87.9	97.0	95.4	8.5
Agriculture	32.2	15.7	4.3(3.6)	- 88.8
Forestry - Fisheries	0.0	.1	.1	---
Mining	0.0	0.0	.1	---
Construction	1.8	4.1	4.3	138.9
Manufacturing	39.1	48.2	53.3(54.0)	38.1
Transportation	1.2	1.8	1.2	0.0
Communication	.1	.4	.4	300.0
Utilities	.8	1.1	1.0	25.0
Wholesale Trade	.6	1.0	1.2	100.0
Retail Trade	6.7	9.1	11.7	74.6
Finance, Ins., Rl. Est.	.9	1.4	2.0	122.2
Business Service	.5	1.1	1.0	100.0
Personal Service	9.6	8.5	9.3	- 3.1
Professional Service	4.3	4.6	7.0	62.8
Public Administration	1.2	1.6	1.9	58.3
Industry, n.e.c.	.8	1.0	1.1	37.5

*Figures for 1968 are in parentheses when different from 1960 figures.

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